DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 319 TM 019 383

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TITLE University-School Partnerships: An Organizational Evaluation.
PUB DATE Nov 92
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Partners in Education: Practical Solutions through Partnerships Conference (Park City, UT, November 5-7, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitude Measures; College Faculty; *College School Cooperation; Comparative Testing; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Organizational Effectiveness; Public Schools; *Public School Teachers; Questionnaires; Teacher Attitudes; Test Construction
IDENTIFIERS *Partnerships in Education; *Weber State College UT

ABSTRACT

Sixteen goal-like statements were developed around P. Reed's contention that university-public school partnerships promote interdependence between groups, a balanced exchange of valued commodities, shared decision making, adaptations to inherent barriers, and an enabling support structure. The questionnaire was pilot tested with members of other partnerships, edited, and sent to all faculty at Weber State University (WSU) in Ogden (Utah) involved in partnerships and to public school teachers (PSTs). From the pilot study, several questions were restated to increase clarity and the instrument was redesigned to emphasize the dual nature of goal-importance and goal-achievement. The instrument was distributed to 12 participants at WSU and 89 PSTs. Responses were received from 50 persons (6 in higher education and 41 PSTs), for a response rate of 50 percent. Respondents reported the relative importance of statements to a partnership and the degree to which statements had been achieved by their respective partnerships. Partnerships at WSU had developed positive relationships. PSTs and university staff can form teams. Specialized knowledge is used as needed. All participants are involved in establishing partnership direction. Although PSTs and university faculty are very supportive of establishing new relationships, progress toward real parity is hindered by their different perceptions of a faculty member's role. University faculty were concerned about individualism and their role as academic free agents; PSTs see themselves as members of a decision making system in which they have more limited control. (RLC)

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UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS: AN ORGANIZATIONAL EVALUATION

by

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Presented at
Partners in Education:
Practical solutions through partnerships.
A conference at Park City, UT
November 5-7, 1992

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UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS: AN EVALUATION
OF THE PROGRAMS AT ONE INSTITUTION

The development of partnerships between the university and the public schools has been a major mission at Weber State University for the past few years, so that the university faculty are able to have more contact with their public school colleagues. At last count, thirteen formal partnerships have been established between the faculty at Weber State and public schools of Northern Utah. Four types of partnerships occur: 1) Alliances in specific disciplines, e.g. English, History, Communications, Foreign Languages, etc.; 2) Interdisciplinary programs, e.g. the site-based English/Education teacher preparation program, the Performing Arts Academy; 3) Centers, with subject area goals, e.g. the Center for Science Education, the Center for Social Science Education; and 4) Special Programs, e.g. the Teachers Academy.

Notable is that eighty-five percent (11/13) of these programs were developed by and operate between the faculties of the arts and sciences and the public schools and include only a few faculty from the College of Education. This ratio is typical of the development of partnerships nationally, according to the American Association of Higher Education. (Wilburn and Lambert, 1991) [1] The phenomenon of art and science faculty leading in the partnership development at Weber State may emphasize the growing awareness of these colleagues of their responsibility for the content knowledge of the teachers. These projects have enhanced the activities of faculty in the College of Education who have continued to be in the schools regularly in their role as teacher educators.

The WSU partnerships have been formed to achieve many different purposes of course, although the over-riding goal seems to be the improvement of schools through more productive teacher inservice programs. This goal parallels the thrust nationally, for as Albert writes, the partnership arrangements contribute "...in significant ways to the quality and effectiveness of American education and to improved achievement by students at all levels." (Wilburn and Lambert, 1991, p.1) At Weber, the purpose of the partnerships emphasizes school improvement almost entirely through the content enhancement of teachers in the schools. The alliances have workshops and seminars which focus on content; the centers bring content specialists to the teachers, and the Teachers Academy emphasizes a different content subjects each year. The Interdisciplinary programs have focused on preservice and student instruction, however, and have included demonstrations of pedagogy and actual on-site teaching as an integral part of their programs.

To achieve the complex goal of improving the achievement of all students through increased content understanding on the part of the teachers, the challenge of the partnerships is the development of new organizational ways to work within the educational enterprise. Effective cooperation between the school people and the professorate is required, including opportunities to share understandings and competencies. Many of these teachers, however, see the university faculty as authority figures, and likewise, many university faculty may see public school teachers as "former

students" in need of refresher courses. Old hierarchical relationships are difficult to disassemble and replace with new egalitarian faces. However, as Nucci and Smylie writes, "The development and success (of partnerships) are functions of new understandings and new ways of thinking and interacting." (Nucci and Smylie, 1991) [2]

In one attempt to analyze this new set of relationships from an organizational viewpoint, Reed has identified a set of organizational attributes which describe effective university-public school partnerships.

1) The partnership promotes interdependence between the groups;

2) The partnership includes a balanced exchange of valued commodities;

3) The partnership implements shared decision-making;

4) The partnership makes adaptations to inherent barriers; and

5) The partnership establishes an enabling support structure. (Bennett and Ishler, 1991, p.35) [3]

THE STUDY.

The attributes listed by Reed were used to assess the new organizational relationships developed in the partnerships established at Weber State University. Organizational arrangements were chosen as the central issue in the study in order to limit the range of issues to be analyzed. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. Are we developing "new ways of interacting and thinking" between the faculty at the university and the public school teachers?

2. Have we "shared," as the partnership language would suggest, or are our relationships still based on a hierarchical system?

3. Are there differences in perception between the public school teachers and the university faculty on partnership relationships?

PROCEDURE.

To assess these questions, a set of sixteen goal-like statements were developed around Reed's five attributes. The statements were organized so that respondents could report both their assessment of the relative <u>importance</u> of each statement to a partnership as well as the degree to which the statement had been <u>achieved</u> by the partnership in which they had participated. (See Appendix I)

The questionnaire was piloted on the members of other partnerships in the region, edited, and sent to all faculty in the university involved in partnerships, and to those teachers in the schools for whom addresses were available. From the pilot study, several questions were restated to increase clarity, and the instrument was

redesigned to emphasize the dual nature of goal-importance and goal-achievement. The instrument was distributed to 101 participants, 12 in higher education at Weber State University, and 89 in the public schools. Responses were received from 50 individuals, 6 (50%) in higher education and 41 (46%) teachers in public education, for an overall 50% response rate.

The fifty respondents included 88% females, and 81% of them were aged 40 or older. A substantial majority were public school teachers (87%) and 94 percent had participated in partnership programs; almost all reported that they had been involved in the Teachers Academy (48%) or the English Alliance (34%).

RESULTS.

The overall survey results are shown in Table I. Note that all statements received positive support. While the totals were less positive on the achievement of the specific partnerships at Weber State, only one item (#12) had less than a majority support. that issue was related to personnel policies or compensation plans. Items #4, (equal funding) and #8, (independent administration) received concern from about a quarter of those responding. In the introductory section, when asked to evaluate their partnership experience, 76% checked "excellent," 20% "good" and 4% "O.K."

In order to assess the response-differences between the university faculty and the public school teachers, a two-tailed t-test was run

on both the importance and the achievement responses to each question. Four items showed p values of .05 or lower on the importance side, and two on the achievement side. One additional difference was just above the .05 level of significance, and is included in Table II below as a separate item for information.

Table II

Comparisons of public school and university responses.

Item	p=	indication
IMPORTANCE		
5	.010	Univ faculty sees equal representation as more important
10	.050	Univ faculty sees consensus as more important
11	.008	Univ faculty sees rewards as more important
16	.001	PS faculty reports equal voice as less important
ACHIEVEMENT		
3	.041	PS faculty thinks time must be available
16	.012	Univ faculty thinks they had more voice
(5	.068	Univ faculty sees decision making important)

DISCUSSION.

The results support the contention that the partnerships at Weber State have developed positive relationships, or are well on their way toward those new relationships. The respondents indicated that teachers and university people are able to form teams, that specialized knowledge is used as needed, and all participants are involved in the establishing direction to the partnerships. Some concern was expressed regarding the lack of equal opportunity to instruct in the teacher preparation classes, but that aspect may be more a lack of time than a lack of authority. Hierarchical arrangements are difficult to displace, but these data suggest that

they are under attack, if not well defeated in the partnerships studied.

Secondly, faculty in higher education feel strongly about academic freedom, and that position seemed clear in these data. The university faculty were more concerned about equal representation, about the use of consensus, and about having more voice in the process in general. Conversely, the public school teachers, apparently more used to hierarchical arrangements in the schools, saw equal voice as less important an issue. They were more concerned that time would be made available for participation. The impact of these differences on the operation of partnerships seem clear: Until public school teachers increase their participation in organizational decision making, the university faculty will dominate the decision making process. The university faculty are used to controlling their role; the public school faculty must learn the skills and develop the attitudes involved in an independent organizational role.

Finally, the two partnerships were both selected groups. The teachers in the Teachers Academy were nominated by their school administrators and this selectivity was emphasized when they attended the meetings. They were given many plaudits and rewards for their participation, including time away from school, special memorabilia, and recognition in the media. While this recognition

was deserved and appropriate for these exceptional teachers, it may have biased their assessment of the Academy as an organization. Likewise the English Alliance respondents were a group of teachers selected for a summer seminar; they helped to form the topics which were discussed and, in fact, made some of the presentations during the program. Typically, the Alliance "fellows" as they are called, come together during the year for follow-up sessions and to meet participants from previous years. All of these activities tend to form a bond between the participants and the Alliance and adds to their commitment to the project.

In summary, this study of partnerships suggests that while public school teachers and university faculty are very supportive of establishing new relationships as they work in new arrangements, progress toward real parity will be hindered by their differing perceptions of the role of a "faculty member." The university faculty are concerned about individualism and their ability to act as academic free agents; the public school faculty see themselves as members of a decision making system in which they have more limited control. Until these perceptions become more parallel, the development of strong, lasting and real partnerships will be delayed.

Table I

Partnership Attribute Importance and Achievement, percentages of university faculty and public school teachers (n = 50)

IMPORTANCE Yes	?	No	Attribute statements	ACHIEVEMENT Yes	?	No
100	0	0	1. Teams of school teachers and university faculty are able to work together well.	100	0	0
85	0	15	2. Cooperative activities are conducted at the school or at the university on a rather equal basis.	89	2	9
96	0	4	3. Time must be made available both for university faculty and the teachers for them to participate fully.	89	2	9
76	0	24	4. The funding is shared equally between the budgets of the participating institutions.	62	34	2
92	8	0	5. The decision making system includes substantially equal representation from the schools and the university.	83	15	2
98	2	0	6. As much time is given to school teachers to explain issues in current practice to the university faculty, as is given university faculty to share current theories and knowledge of subject matter to the teachers.	72	4	24
87	4	9	7. In a partnership field-site setting, the university faculty and the school teachers both instruct in the teacher preparation college classes for about the same amount of time.	56	24	20
71	6	23	8. An administrative structure as independent as possible from the administration of either the school district or the university is established.	67	24	9

90	2	8	9. Each individual has the responsibility to participate actively in the other setting, (e.g. the university faculty member does something at a school and vice-versa.)	65	4	31
98	0	2	10. Most decisions affecting a partnership are the result of consensus involving members from both (or all) participating organizations.	87	4	9
96	2	2	11. Appropriate rewards are given to both the university faculty and the school teachers.	82	11	7
81	4	15	12. University promotion and tenure policies (or district compensation plans) reflect the importance of participation in partnerships.	41	26	23
100	0	0	13. The specialized knowledge of both the experienced teachers and the university faculty is used.	93	0	7
98	0	2	14. The members in the partnership are assigned specific tasks or jobs to keep the programs going.	89	2	9
80	2	18	15. External rewards, (plaques, news reports, equipment, etc.) recognize the efforts of individuals in the partnership.	90	4	6
88	4	8	16. All participants have equal voice in deciding the direction of the partnership.	86	7	7

ENDNOTES

1. Franklin Wilber and Leo Lambert (1991) Linking America's Schools and Colleges. Washington DC: American Association of Higher Education.

2. Larry Nucci and Mark Smylie, (1991) "University-Community Partnerships," Metropolitan Universities, Summer, pp. 83-91.

3. P. Reed (1988). School/University Collaboration. Paper prepared for North Central Regional Educational Laboratory and presented at the national conference of the Association of Teacher Educators in San Diego, CA., reported in R. Bennett and M. Ishler, (1991) "Guidelines for Effective School-University Collaboration." Record in Educational Administration and Supervision. 11 (2).